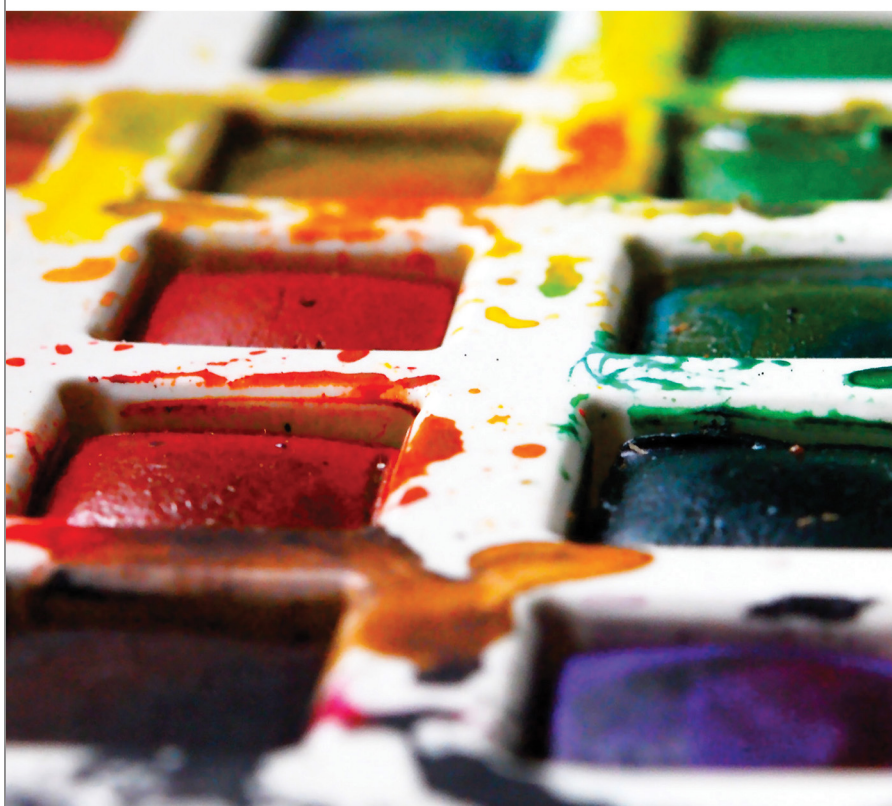


# Why teach art?



# Why teach art?



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## Introduction

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What value does art have in the school curriculum? This unit, primarily aimed at colleagues teaching art in schools, explores the justification for including art in the school curriculum together with some of the current criticisms commonly heard.

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# Learning Outcomes

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After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand the underlying values and justifications of teaching art and art history within the school curriculum
- understand developing strategies to explore and engage with some of the subject criticisms voiced
- understand enhancing and supporting pupil engagement with and exploration of these issues
- understand extending teaching approaches that incorporate some of these values and ideas.

# 1. Why Teach Art?

Acquisition of sight precedes language. In a tangible sense visual engagement with the world situates us and defines who we are.

Consider the three following non-linguistic signs.



Figure 1 Three non linguistic signs

Respectively, these signify a commercial brand, a road sign and a major piece of commemorative architecture (and tourist attraction!). Even while respecting varying cultural norms it might be argued that these are immediately recognisable cultural icons. All three are highly visible cultural products, which reflect human agency and creativity.

In so far as the category of art is an open concept all three might make a claim for inclusion. The point being made is simply that art (the process and methods involved in its making) and art history (broadly the study of its development and contexts) are *forms of cultural enquiry*. In this sense they have profound significance and meaning for all of us.

Now read 'Art and Lifelong Learning' by Tim Jones.

Click on the 'View document' link below to download Art and Lifelong Learning

[View document](#)

## 2. Does art have a value?

Art has been described as an open concept: a cumulative and developing category of objects and processes, which by its nature is not easily definable. Therefore it might be more relevant to consider how art based activities enhance human aptitudes, abilities and skills.

Some of the skills and values gained from the study of art and art history are listed below. For present purposes these can be subdivided into those that are *intrinsic* (undertaken for their own sake) and those that are *extrinsic* (externally motivated).

Intrinsic aptitudes include:

- creativity and imagination;
- self-expression and perception;
- spatial awareness;
- visual aptitude (perception of colour, tone, composition, size, etc.);
- physical acuity (drawing, hand–eye coordination, etc.).

Some extrinsic aptitudes are:

- developing powers of description and analysis;
- extending intercultural awareness (icons, practices, symbols);
- planning and executing art projects;
- developing and supporting arguments and viewpoints;
- collaborative peer working, self-directed learning.

Please now consider Activity 1.

### Activity 1

Evaluate any appropriate lesson plans or teaching materials against the descriptors above. You may wish to reflect on the extent to which some or all these aptitudes are evident or implicit within your lesson planning, delivery and pupil learning outcomes.

Read the lesson outline here and look at the animated sequence below. What learning might have been taking place in this lesson?

Click on the 'View document' link below to download the Lesson Outline

[View document](#)

Interactive content is not available in this format.

The lesson from which this work was produced was about 'tone'. The teacher also intended the students to become familiar with using an animation package and to experience co-operative group work. How does a lesson such as this fit into your ideas of what art and design in schools is all about? How does it relate to the general aims of art in education?



## 3. Responding to criticisms

A government minister and a school governor made the following comments, respectively:

‘Art is the icing on the cake.’

‘We have children here who can’t even speak English properly – they should be doing more of that instead of leisure subjects like art.’

Both of these are, as you may appreciate, instrumental – or means–end – statements. In their various ways they place art, and by implication other humanities subjects, unfavourably on a spectrum according to their perceived ‘usefulness’ or applicability. These and similar arguments are of course not new and have been voiced at regular intervals throughout history. However, of more relevance in terms of contemporary pedagogic practice and constructive engagement with a key-skills agenda is how teaching professionals might tackle these statements and perceptions.

### Activity 2

Consider your own experience of criticisms and the context in which they were made. How did you respond to them?

As an exercise, take one or two of the aptitudes listed earlier and formulate a reasoned argument in response to criticism, possibly biasing your choice towards your own experience or subject specialisation. Develop ideas of how you would counter specific comments you’ve experienced, or use those above.

To inform this exercise you may wish to consider the arguments set out in ‘Examining rationales’ below.

Click on the ‘View document’ link below to read ‘Examining rationales’.

[View document](#)

## 4. Balloon debate

Another statement from a 14 year-old student:

'I don't want to do art – it's rubbish'

In addressing such a straight dismissal it is naturally worth considering the student's prior learning experiences, aptitudes and influences. However, this perception nevertheless encodes a declaration of value, which is not fundamentally different to some of the earlier quotes explored. It is perhaps unsurprising that negative perceptions voiced by policy makers, government figures and those in positions of public authority do influence both parental and student value judgements. This may explain why, according to some critics, disciplines such as art and music have been given a comparatively marginal status within many school curricular including topics in the National Curriculum for England.

The following activity might be useful in testing and reflecting on this hypothesis, while offering an opportunity to re-emphasise links and interdependences, particularly to the art curriculum. Student feedback may provide one basis for adjusting or reflecting upon present teaching practice or delivery.

Now look at Activities 3 and 4.

### Activity 3

Although the card exercise given here is of a familiar format, it can be a very useful tool for involving students in exploring perceptions of value in a discursive and collaborative forum. There are various approaches, one of which is to divide your pupils into five groups of six. Then each group picks three cards from a set containing the names of a variety of careers, vocations and professions. Here are some typical examples.

Soldier	Chef	Art History
Teacher	Cleaner	Engineer
Train Driver	Politician	Artist
Priest	Nurse	Plumber

Each group could be asked to rank these in ascending order of 'value' according to *their* criteria and perceptions.

A printable set of cards is available by clicking on 'view document' below

[View document](#)

Pupils might also be encouraged to discuss issues of social and cultural interdependency, and some of the issues this raises about the nature of civil society. It might also be useful to relate some of the conclusions or findings to the intrinsic and extrinsic listings in the first section.

### Activity 4

Consider how you might devise a scheme of work over a term for some of your pupils which incorporates some or all of the aptitudes listed earlier. If you teach in the UK, this should be the key stage appropriate to your year group.

Here are three specific issues to keep in mind.

- To what extent do different artistic media reflect some or all of the justifications and objections just explored?
- As well as teaching practical and process related skills, how can the historical perspective inform the study of art?
- What strategies can be used to assess the achievement of learning outcomes?

## Conclusion

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This free course provided an introduction to studying Education, Childhood & Youth. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance, and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

# Keep on learning

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## References

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Jones, T. (1999) 'Art and Lifelong Learning', *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 18 (1), p. 138.

# Acknowledgements

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